

Niagara College stresses 'community partnership' in Library revamp



By Brock Weir

If you attended last Wednesday's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony at Town Hall and had the opportunity to sample turkey sliders or some of the other goodies being served up under the big top of the inflatable igloo, this was your first taste in what could be a long relationship between Aurora and the Canadian Institute of Food and Wine.

The Canadian Institute of Food and Wine, a part of Niagara College, was on hand to introduce themselves to members of the public last week after Council signed off on a \$4 million revamp of the Aurora Armoury to house a branch of the institute in the heart of the Downtown Core.

Featuring an expansion of the Town Park building, opening the historic structure up to its heritage surroundings, and bringing the building back to much of its original glory, it's a five-year lease deal which proponents hope will bring much needed revitalization to Aurora's traditional centre.

But, for the College, it is an opportunity to plant roots in Aurora as a firm community partner.

In a presentation to Council last week, Craig Youdale, Dean of Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute said the deal was 'not a business proposition for Niagara College [but] a partnership' that fits in with the strategic plans of both the College and the Town of Aurora.

'We feel strongly about the expertise we have,' he said. 'When we started talking about the opportunity here in Aurora, it really fit with our own strategic opportunity to provide the expertise we have and work within our own community, within the Region, and be able to bring our particular brand of expertise to the community. This is about partnership and a two-way street. We look very much to working with the Town, with all its community leaders, with various community groups, and we're looking for opportunities to be able to develop a space that is not just about teaching cooking or having a wine tasting, but is about community and having the opportunity for all areas of the community to access this space.'

'The Town provided us with many proposals from a variety of people who have ideas not just for the Armoury, but for many other things in [Aurora's] Strategic Plan [and] what really excited us about the Armoury was attaching to the Park, being a vital part of what I know is an important centre. I have friends ...who were born and raised in Aurora and they speak so much about the park in the centre part of Town and how much it means to them, so we know and really feel strongly about the importance and we want to make sure that's the building that connects the park.'

The College, he said, envisions a refurbished building that is 'as open-minded and multipurpose as possible' and they are open to all ideas, concepts and input that might be offered by the community.

'Eventually, over time, we can morph this concept and idea to be really owned by the Town of Aurora and that we can bring what we have at Niagara [here] and make it your own.'

While the culinary program at Niagara College is over 40 years old, the Canadian Food and Wine Institute was only formally established in 2010. Since then they have built upon their culinary expertise with the introduction of viticulture and brewmaster programs and broke ground just last week what is now Canada's only artisan distillery program.

“This is the only place in the world where all these educational opportunities are available in one spot,” said Mr. Youdale. Their Culinary Innovation and Food Technology program is another facet of the Institute that is unique in Canada, he said, in helping people hone their skills in food research and product development, and fostering ideas from farm to shelf to plate. “A recent development for us, and this is what we hope to bring, at least in part, to Aurora, is what we call our Expert Edge corporate training strategy,” he said. “This is to bring all that roundness of education and put it into a package of success to the average individual. Those who simply want to learn about our business and be able to offer training to them on a short term basis, but we also want to access the industry professional to be able to find training for them and also look at our corporate world and how we can use food and beverage as a way to do things like team building, corporate training and development. We talked [with the Town] about how food and beverage is always looked at as a stepping stone to maybe something else in the future, but we really feel strongly that food and beverage is a career, a life. It is an important part of all our lives just in the day to day, but also for young individuals who are looking to develop careers and move forward into the world and we look at what we do in the Canadian Food and Wine Institute as a really important stepping stone to a great career and a great, fulfilling life.”